Dave's Pipe 101: Getting Started
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This doc aims to serve as a jumping off point for any new pipe smoker. There's a lot of information and advice out there, and it can be overwhelming when you're just starting out. This guide will review some basic information and provide some (generally) universally-agreed upon techniques and/or recommendations, so you can begin your pipe smoking journey with a bit more confidence and knowledge.

Please note that much of this document contains my own personal recommendations. These may not match those of other pipe smokers. However, I have tried to keep my recommendations in line with the majority opinion among pipe smokers. (or, best I can tell)

Before we dig into the tobacco itself, most new people tend to ask….

What should I buy?

tl;dr Shopping List:

- A corn cob pipe
- A pipe tool (aka Czech tool)
- Pipe cleaners
- Tobacco
- Soft-flame lighter

Thankfully this is pretty straightforward and will allow you to begin smoking a pipe with minimal cost. Pipe smoking in general is far more economical than cigars or cigarettes in most countries, so you don't have to break the bank to get started. In fact, I recommend you keep it as cheap as possible while making sure to buy quality, so it isn't a huge loss if you find pipe smoking is not for you.

Pipes can be made from many different materials. Most often you will see them made from briar (wood), meerschaum, clay, or corn cob. Briar is the most common of the four, and is what most people think of when they think of a "pipe." But, for someone just beginning, **I always recommend going with a corn cob pipe.**

Missouri Meerschaum is the foremost mfg of corn cob pipes. Don't let the name throw you off, their pipes aren't actual meerschaum. They've been in the business for over 100 years and continue to make low-cost, reliable smoking apparati. Head over to their website and check out their offerings: https://corncobpipe.com/ (I am not affiliated with MM, I just love their products!)

Take note of the one(s) you like. You can either purchase from their site directly, or from any number of online tobacco retailers. We'll look at some examples of those later. Don't worry about **"filtered" vs. "non-filtered"** right now.

Common popular MM cobs include:

- Legend
- Missouri Pride
- Country Gentleman
- Ozark Mountain - this one is hardwood, so if you are on the fence about the cob aesthetic, this is a good choice for a low-cost wood pipe.

Many retailers and MM directly offer "starter kits." These can be a great way to buy everything you need, minus tobacco. Just make sure it contains all the items in the "shopping list" above.

After you find a pipe that suits your fancy, you will want to grab a **pipe tool**.

This will allow you to tamp your tobacco in the bowl as you smoke and help you clear the bowl when you are finished.

Then, you will want to obtain a **soft-flame lighter**. That old Bic or Clipper sitting in the junk drawer would do nicely. **DO NOT USE A JET LIGHTER OR YOU WILL HAVE A BAD TIME.**

Finally, toss some **pipe cleaners** into your cart. To the surprise of many, these have purpose beyond art projects. To keep your pipe nice, clean, and in tip-top shape - run 1 pipe cleaner through the pipe after each smoke. Common brands include BJ Long, Dill's, and Brigham.

You can fold it after running it through the shank and swirl it around in the bowl with light pressure to get rid of any unwanted buildup from your session.

Now that you have the necessary gear to begin smoking, you will need tobacco.

What tobacco should I buy?

There are certainly no shortage of options, and it can be tough to figure out what to put in your bowl! While you can certainly smoke any tobacco you choose out of your recently acquired pipe, it's a good idea to start off with blends that are milder and generally agreeable with most anyone.

Pipe tobacco is largely in two BIG categories, with smaller ones further defining them. **Aromatic** and **Non-aromatic.**

Aromatic blends are probably easiest to think of as "flavored" pipe tobacco. Similar to flavored or infused cigars, aromatic pipe tobacco blends feature a flavor or combination of flavors that have been imbued into the tobacco itself. These nearly always leave behind a pleasant smelling room note. This might help with any significant other who may not share your enthusiasm for smoking. 😎

Solid aromatic options include:

- Captain Black line of blends
- Bokrum Riff line of blends
- MacBaren 7 Seas line
- Sir Walter Raleigh Aromatic
- Lane 1-Q, oft-touted as THE quintessential pipe tobacco smell
- Lane BCA
- Sutliff Vanilla Custard
- Lane RLP-6
- Cornell & Diehl Autumn Evening

Non-aromatic blends are just the opposite, i.e. "non-flavored." Minimally cased, natural tobacco flavor. Often you will find multiple subtypes of tobacco within the same blend in this category. Combinations of those types are what make these blends unique from one another. Although, some non-aromatic blends are just one type of tobacco.

Subtypes:

- Burley - nutty, creamy, mellow
- Latakia - leathery, smokey, complex
- Virginia - grass, hay, naturally sweet
- Perique - earthy, fruity, savory
- Turkish/Oriental - mild, smooth, naturally sweet and aromatic

Solid non-aromatic options include:

- Orlik Golden Sliced
- Escudo
- Peterson's Nightcap
- Peterson's Early Morning Cup
- Presbyterian Mixture
- Arango Balkan Supreme
- Cornell & Diehl Haunted Bookshop
- Peterson's Elizabethan Blend

There's another layer with this category, since non-aromatic blends are further categorized based on their components. Blends labeled as **English blends** must contain the characteristically smoky and robust Latakia variety of tobacco. I don't recommend an English blend be the **first** thing you smoke in your new pipe. For someone first starting out, Latakia can pack a real wallop in taste and smell - depending on the blend. However, both Night Cap and Presbyterian in the list above are good options for an intro to Latakia.

There are further categories, but that knowledge will come with time. For example, **English aromatics** include the aforementioned Latakia in addition to some aromatic tobacco for a "hybrid" experience, if you will. **VA/Bur** is Virginia tobacco with Burley. **VA/Per** is Virginia and Perique. Etc…etc…

For now I am opting not to get too into the different flavor/smell characteristics of each non-aromatic variety of tobacco, since that would make this document quite long. Just make sure to read some of the reviews on whichever blend you are thinking of buying. Lots of pipe smokers review their products, which can offer great insight into how the blend may or may not suit your palette.(your friend here: https://www.tobaccoreviews.com/)

With that, you are now ready to make some purchases and get to smoking! Remember to take the advice you get from *any* source with a grain of salt. **There is no right or wrong way to smoke a pipe!** You will develop your own methods as time goes on. No need to stress about particular techniques, they may or may not be right for you. But, **do** try them! Persist in your learning. We all continue to learn new, interesting things about pipe smoking. Enjoy the ride!

Recommended links for further reading. These will go deeper into some of the info above.

- https://borkumriffusa.com/brp-101/
- https://www.bespokepost.com/field-guide/a-beginners-guide-to-pipe-tobacco
- https://www.pipesandcigars.com/faq/pipe-smoking-for-beginners/2021233/
- https://www.tobaccopipes.com/blog/10-best-pipe-tobaccos-for-beginners/
- https://www.smokingpipes.com/smokingpipesblog/single.cfm/post/pipe-tobaccos-new-smokers-should-try